



Christmas Eve Service of the Candles

Genesis

Exodus

The Prophets

HYMN: It Came Upon the Midnight Clear 181

Service of the Candles

John

HYMN: O Little Town of Bethlehem 182

LITANY OF CONFESSION:

L: O God, Christmas is happening again in our hearts.

P: At the level of our love for God, we find ourselves celebrating with a lively wonder our sense of the strength and beauty we forgot was there.

L: We are amazed that we are part of a history that goes back to the beginning of time.

P: We find ourselves dwelling on the mystery of God.

L: We feel tenderness for our enemies, hear again the cries of the sick, the lonely and the condemned.

P: The anguish of our wars is exposed in us bitterly.

L: Even more, we find ourselves reaching out our hands in healing.

P: We would give all people, "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

L: We understand the compassion of God, and we perceive that to live well is to live simply.

P: We have come to adore the Christ Child, to find meaning, and to become the children of God.

L: Teach us to run with shepherds and kneel with kinds, until our despair -- touched by grace -- becomes joy.

P: Let your blazing birth burn us down to honesty about our need for your hand upon us, for hope in our hearts, and for praise of you.

ALL: Our God in heaven, holy is your name. Your dominion come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not bring us to the test, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the power, the reign, and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

L: God be with you. P: And also with you.

L: Lift up your hearts. P: We lift them up to God.

L: Let us give thanks.

P: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

SANCTUS: Holy, holy, holy, God of power and grace: Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. Hosanna in the highest.

THE BREAKING OF BREAD/THE BLESSING OF THE CUP

THE MYSTERY OF OUR FAITH: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Service of the Candles - Conclusion

Passing of the Light

HYMN: Silent Night 208

BENEDICTION: Go now into the world with the light you have received. Go so that love may be known and peace on earth may truly come in the hearts of all people.

HYMN: Angels We have heard on High 203

BENEDICTION: Let your light so shine before the world, that all may see your good works and give glory to God who is in heaven.

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Tomorrow - Open House at the Pastors. If you are not spending Christmas with relatives or friends, please come spend it with Shirley and me.

SUNDAY: Brunch at the church, \$1.50, to benefit the Deacons' Fund.

TUESDAY: Bible Study.

WEDNESDAY: Rap - New series begins.

THURSDAY - New Year's Open House at the Pastors' and Shirleys.

NEW YEAR'S DAY: Ballgames at the Church, black eye peas and ham hocks. Bring a dish and come join us for the New Year's day games.

SATURDAY, January 2nd. Movie Night. \$3.00 to benefit the church.

SUNDAY: Dickens' Christmas at Joe Tate's. See him for location.

Merry Christmas to you all, and the very best of the New Year to you all.

UNTO US

A CHILD

IS BORN



HIS NAME

SHALL BE CALLED

EMMANUEL

12 B.C.



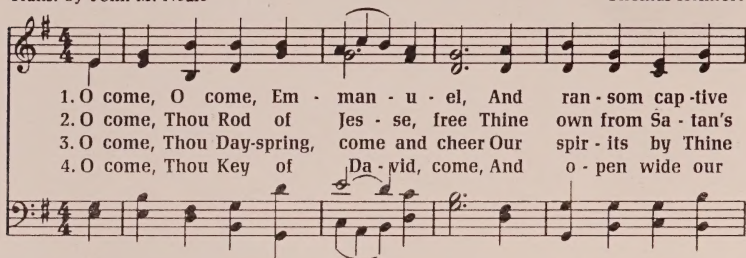
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

VENI EMMANUEL

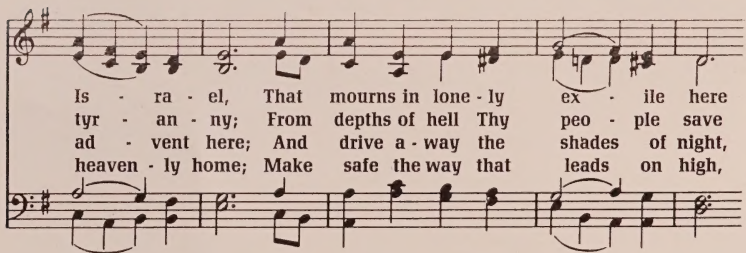
Latin Hymn

Trans. by John M. Neale

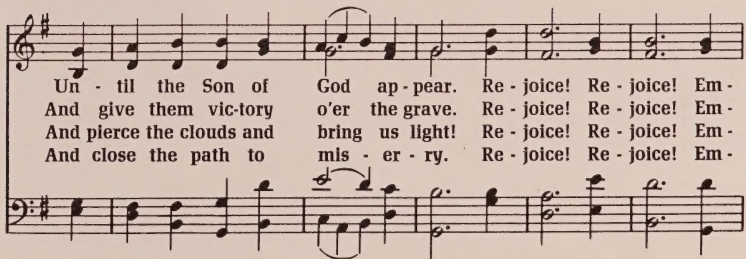
Thomas Helmore



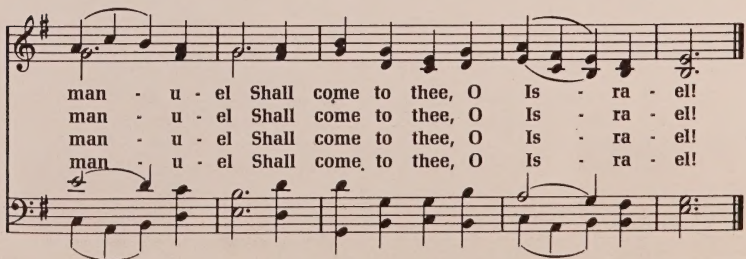
1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2. O come, Thou Rod of Jes - se, free Thine own from Sa - tan's
3. O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer Our spir - its by Thine
4. O come, Thou Key of Da - vid, come, And o - pen wide our



Is - ra - el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
tyr - an - ny; From depths of hell Thy peo - ple save
ad - vent here; And drive a - way the shades of night,
heaven - ly home; Make safe the way that leads on high,



Un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -
And give them vic - tory o'er the grave. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -
And pierce the clouds and bring us light! Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -
And close the path to mis - er - ry. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -



man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!
man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!
man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!
man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!



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It was the Night Before Jesus Came

It was the night before Jesus came and all through the house

Not a creature was praying, not one in the house.
Their Bibles were lain on the shelf without care

In hopes that Jesus would not come there.
The children were dressing to crawl into bed.

Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head.
And Mom in her rocker with baby on her lap
Was watching the Late Show while I took a nap.
When out of the East there arose such a clatter.

I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!

When what to my wondering eyes should appear

But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here.
With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray

I knew in a moment this must be **The Day**
The light of His face made me cover my head

It was Jesus! returning just like He had said.
And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth,

I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself.
In the Book of Life which He held in His hand
Was written the name of every saved man.

He spoke not a word as He searched for my name;
When He said, "It's not here," my head hung in shame.

The people whose names had been written with love
He gathered to take to His Father above.

With those who were ready He rose without a sound
While all the rest were left standing around.

I fell to my knees, but it was too late;
I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate.

I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight.

Oh, if only I had been ready tonight.

In the words of this poem the meaning is clear;

The coming of Jesus is drawing near.
There's only one life and when comes the last call
We'll find that the Bible was true after all!

"YES, I REMEMBER BETHLEHEM"

Written By Frederick B. Speakman (1954)

Adapted By Kathy S. Houser (1993)

Come in! Come in...

Yes, I'm Jesse Benhadad. Yes, Jesse of Jericho, if you wish. Now, come in out of that drafty hall. I have a fire stirred up in my counting den here, and we can talk out of earshot of the serving girls. I'm told the foxes of Idumaea have sharp ears, can hear a twig snap a mile away. But I'll put those maids of mine up against any beasts from here to Sinai for their hearing of what's no business of theirs!

Sit there, close to the fire. That's right, where I can see your face. "Luke," you call yourself? Luke, a physician? And I'd know at a glance you were a Roman.

So you know our Benjamin? Know him in Jerusalem. How is the lad? Is he well? Will he marry soon, or ever, for that matter? We've sent so many messages hinting at a visit home.

And it was really my son who sent you to talk to me? Sent you to hear the story? There you are now. Think of that! Why, he laughed at it with all the others. It was his laughter even more than the others' that made me swear by the eyes of the prophets I'd never mention it again. It simply shows you that you should never be bothered by the laughter of youth. Cherish it like music. For it isn't the scornful affair that it seems. It's the noise of a heart that's still fluid. It's the sound of tenderness that's as yet ashamed to show itself. I recall laughing one night long ago... laughing because I didn't know what else to do.

Yes, I remember Bethlehem. Remember it too well! It's been well over thirty years. And that long the memory's been with me. Maturing with maturity, but still bright.

Let me go back to the beginning... We were married at Bethlehem, Leah and I. I worked for her father, Eliab, there at his inn. No dowry came with Leah; she was dowry enough! Tall, with the grace of an tree they boast about in Lebanon. With the true Judean's brown of an eye and the low voice of the brooks from off Mount Hermon. But love is never for long an escape from the harshness of the world!

We had awakened, Leah and I, to what a world's like under Ceaser, any Ceaser who wants his face not just on your coins but on your soul. So that existence becomes only that. And all its simple joys must be treasured quickly and furtively under constant fears... Yet, business was brisk that season, you see.

Turning guests away, we were. Old father Eliab was almost cheerful, sacking up quite a piece of coin. And, irony of ironies, it was all Ceaser's doing! His new law for a head tax in the provinces demanded that every mother's son alive return to the town of his birth to register for taxing. The inn was crowded as never before; we had a bedding on the roof and even tents pitched in the alleys. And when this fellow of about my age came along that evening imploring us for lodging, he was just another like the many I'd turned away all day.

How are you ever going to know life's moments when they come, Luke? The great hours, the shining hours, the ones that, later, can mean much- they come walking up looking like any other hour. And always when you're busy. Always when you're so convinced that something else you're doing is so important! I'd have sent that couple away. And, oh, kindly enough. But Leah saved me. It was she who noticed the woman. It was Leah who thought of the stable out back. And I laughed. That was my contribution. I laughed, a little proud of Leah, a little embarrassed at myself.

Then, she awakened me long after midnight. I awoke with that abrupt, complete alertness which always proves the rest of you has been awake long before your mind agreed. And I awoke to a different world! There was Leah, with a look on her face that I'd only seen hints of before. Her normal reserve all shattered, and her words a jumble. All this about a Baby she had helped birth in the stable and the visions the Mother had

told her! How this was no ordinary child, but the Gift of God Himself! Such a tale as normally would have sent me raging, but this night brought me running! There, in a silence you could fairly feel! You've never heard a Judean town really silent till your ears throb with it. Not so much as the bark of a dog, or the creak of a wagon's wheel. As if the whole world was asleep. As if the very sky had caught it's breath.

Halfway across the yard, we heard it and saw it. But how will I tell you? Here words fail. It was silent and yet there was music. It was dark and yet there was light. The music! It was the music of life that you know is there but never quite hear. Oh, but that night, it was being strummed from every tree top and hymned from every cloud bank! And the light! As if we too were luminous reflecting some untraceable radiance! Certain that had we stood in the distance we'd have seen that over Bethlehem some tremendous signal fire of glory had been lighted.

I don't know how long we stood there, letting it speak to us what can't be said. But then Leah told me of the shepherds who had come while I had slept. They were all abashed and uncertain, but determined in their quest. They stammered through their story of a sky punctured by voices exalting an anthem of God's intended peace.

It was then I could wait no longer to go in. I didn't stay long. Just long enough to worship with eyes wide open, to etch that scene indelibly here behind my forehead. A peasant and her

Baby and her husband hovering near them. I went back out under the stars.

Oh, I've doubted my senses many times since, but that night it was all so sure. And I found myself wondering why I was so willing to accept an incredible claim without even knowing what it all meant. But I knew somehow I'd always been waiting for that night, that light, this Child, and this claim, which my heart would never have dared to phrase. For it's a remarkable thing that God has fashioned in the human heart. I surveyed it that night. And somehow I'd never been able to write it all off as a web of lies. SOMEHOW, I KNEW THAT WHAT WAS BEST IN ME WAS LINKED WITH WHAT WAS HIGHEST AMONG THOSE STARS.

Leah and I have lived here a long time, Luke, but I've remained faithful to that night. Oh nothing came of it. We had a flurry a year or so ago, when a Nazarene teacher came through Jericho. It was He whom my Benjamin followed to Jerusalem. But I understand the Nazarene got... into trouble... there...

...but you'd know all about that... Wait! Yes! You know our Benjamin! You haven't come to listen! You came to tell! LUKE, WAS THAT THE MESSIAH ???

